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CANADA, NOVA SCOTIA AND FIRST NATIONS IN NOVA SCOTIA SIGN HISTORIC CHILD WELFARE FRAMEWORK

2-3071

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA (July 22, 2008) – Gerald Keddy, Member of Parliament for South Shore – St. Margaret's, on behalf of the Honourable Chuck Strahl, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, together with the Honourable Judy Streatch, Nova Scotia Minister of Community Services, the Honourable Michael Baker, Nova Scotia Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Chief Lawrence Paul, President, Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia, today announced an historic framework for First Nations child and family services in Nova Scotia.

"We are pleased to move forward with our Nova Scotia and First Nations partners, who share the Government of Canada's commitment to implement concrete changes in child and family services on reserves," said Mr. Keddy.

"This new framework will help ensure families receive appropriate child and family services in a timely manner."

The Government of Canada has invested $10.2 million in new funding to the Nova Scotia child and family services framework, which will be distributed over five years to the Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia. This investment will provide First Nations agencies with new resources that identify a family's need before a child is removed from the family home.

"We have no greater responsibility than to ensure our children grow up in safe and healthy communities," said Minister Streatch. "We are pleased to be working with the federal government and our First Nations communities to ensure that all our children and families have access to the programs and services they need to remain healthy and together."

"Today's announcement demonstrates the positive and growing working relationship we have been developing in Nova Scotia," said Minister Baker. "Mi'kmaq children represent the future of First Nation communities in Nova Scotia -- and today's announcement demonstrates our combined commitment to improving conditions for First Nations children and youth -- both provincially and nationally."

"I am very pleased with the Government of Canada's approval of this framework for the Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia," said Chief Lawrence Paul. "The multi-year funding included with this framework will support the Nova Scotia child and family services framework and provide the appropriate working environment for staff to ensure First Nations children on reserve have access to culturally appropriate prevention and protection services that are integral to ensuring their well being."

This framework with the province and First Nations in Nova Scotia is an effective model for other provinces and First Nations agencies that may wish to discuss similar arrangements for an enhanced prevention-focused approach. It shares the vision of the Alberta Response Model. The tripartite agreement signed in Alberta last year helps to ensure First Nations families receive the support and services they need before they reach crisis.

Backgrounder - First Nations Child and Family Services (National)

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Backgrounder - First Nations Child and Family Services (National)

Today, First Nations children are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population. Historically there has been no federal child welfare legislation. As a result, the Government of Canada, through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), formed agreements with many provincial governments to deliver child welfare services on-reserve. INAC would then reimburse the provinces for services which were provided.

The goal of INAC's First Nations Child and Family Services (CFS) program is to support First Nations communities in providing culturally sensitive child welfare services comparable to those available to other provincial residents in similar circumstances. The First Nations CFS program is one of many INAC programs and services dedicated to individual and family well-being.

Since the creation of this program, there has been a significant increase in the number of First Nations CFS agencies from 34 in 1989 to 108 in 2007. In 2006-07, INAC funded 108 First Nations child and family service agencies across the country. INAC provided $450 million in funding to support 8,262 children in care (in foster homes, group homes and institutions.) In Budget 2008, the federal government committed $43 million over two years for prevention-based models of CFS on reserve.

First Nations Child and Family Services – Enhanced Prevention-Focussed Approach in Nova Scotia

The Province of Nova Scotia has been delivering an enhanced prevention-focused approach since 1991. The framework endorsed by First Nations, INAC and Nova Scotia outlines a broad set of provincially comparable goals and objectives.

The enhanced prevention approach will support:

- Families getting the support and services they need before they reach a crisis;
- Community-based services and the child welfare system working together so families receive more appropriate services in a timely manner;
- First Nations children in care benefiting from permanent homes (placements) sooner by, for example, involving families in planning alternative care options; and
- Services and supports coordinated in a way that best helps the family.

Child Welfare Service Delivery in Nova Scotia

There are 13 First Nations communities in Nova Scotia. On March 31, 2007 there were 152 First Nations children in the care of Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia. There is one First Nations CFS agency in Nova Scotia that delivers services to families living on reserve and is delegated by the province. This agency receives funding from INAC.